

The Athenian Mercury:

Resolving WEEKLY all the most

Nice and Curious Questions

Propos'd by the INGENIOUS.

Saturday, April 4th. 1691.

Quest. 1. **H**OW Beasts came into Islands? to which may be added, for the Similitude of the Argument another, sent by an ingenious Gentleman from Cambridge — *How some remote Islands came first to be inhabited?*

Ans. The latter of the Questions, which appears to me much the less difficult of the two, and on which the other may perhaps have some dependance, shall for these Reasons be first Answered. In order to which it must be remembred, that this being a thing only to be guest at, History therein leaving us in the dark, all we can do, is to advance some probable Hypothesis, which must stand till it appears chargeable with any absurdity.

We say then, that the World was first Peopled from the East, as Holy Writ assures, and History and Reason perswade, Arts and Arms first flourished there, and almost innumerable Armies appearing in early times, whence repeated swarms or inundations still issuing in the same Course with the Sun, thrust on one another from Place to Place, and Island to Island, we mean those less remote from the Continent, and which in clear Weather might be seen from it, and Ships easily get thither; for whatever other Authors say, we are sure there was Shipping as early as Noah; but what's this to those more remote, as America, when the Compass was not invented? first let that be prov'd an Island, and then we'll dispute further on't; in the mean time shall take the liberty to suppose on, that 'twas People from the North-west-part of Tartary, which if not a Continent, must yet be much nearer to those parts than our side of the World. For the second Question — Beasts might pass the same way, and perhaps easier than Men; If 'tis all Land through inaccessible Snows and Woods, if only some strait and narrow Sea separates, nothing more common than for Sailers in that part of the World to find great Numbers of living Beasts floating upon the Ice, and this way as well as other wild Beasts might be driven over, or be there without so much trouble, if we admit this following Hypothesis, wherein I can foresee no absurdity, That there were Islands before the Flood can't be prov'd by History or Reason: let's suppose therefore there were none, but some actually made by its Fury and Violence, other parts of the Continent only disposed or prepared for Islands, continuing joyn'd by a very small Isthmus; while that remain'd, there was a Bridge

large enough for the Beasts to go over, which being in process of time worn away, whereof Tradition, Observation and History gives us Instances, those Peninsulas were thereby transform'd into compleat Islands.

Quest. 2. *Whether a Person Divorc'd by Law may lawfully Marry another, while those they were first marry'd to are yet living?*

Ans. The best Casuist that ever was, resolves the Question in a few words, 5th. of St. Matth. 32. *Whosoever shall Marry her that is Divorced, committeih Adultery;* — and that's enough to give the importunate Querist satisfaction, if he really either wants or desires it.

Quest. 3. *Whether Polygamy were lawful to the Jews?*

Ans. To answer this, we must consider the Term, *Lawful*, in respect to the Law of Nature writ in the minds of Men. The positive Laws of God, and even the Ceremonial Institutions for the People of the Jews, and those Laws, or Usages and Customs which had the force of Laws, which they established among themselves, as they were a Body Politick. By the last I know not but it might be lawful, at least 'twas certainly customary, and seems tolerated by Moses, who was their sovereign Prince and King in *Jeshurun*; for the same Reason Divorces were, namely for the hardness of their Hearts, and to prevent worse consequences. By the Laws which God himself reveal'd to 'em by Moses, we find not one Syllable like any such Permission, whence it does not appear that by them 'twas ever lawful. By the Laws of Nature I think it absolutely unlawful, and to this our Saviour reduces the Jews, telling 'em — *from the beginning it was not so*. Had there been any necessity of more Women than one, more wou'd have been form'd for the first Man — he had all conduc'd to his happiness, and what does otherwise is unnatural. It seems disagreeable to the Law of Nature, to permit such a practice as draws with it the most fatal Inconveniences and unnatural disturbances in Families and even Empires, which Polygamy unavoidably does, as we may easily see in the Seraglio's of the Eastern World. *There's no earthly Happiness like mutual Love*, the more intense the one, the greater the other; but Love divided into various Channels or Beds, is like a River serv'd at the same rate, *always lessen'd, sometimes lost*. After all, whether 'tis unlawful by the Christian Law, is another Question: for as some things are thereby lawful to us, which were

were unlawful to the Jews, so by parity of reason, several things lawful to them may not be so to us.

Quest. 4. *Whether is happier, a Married or an Unmarried State?*

Ans. In Fact 'tis much as you Order it. Abstractively considered, we must ask the Towns leave to conclude the Married State the happier: For this we have unanswerable Authority, 'tis Eternal Wisdom that says, 'Tis not good for Man to be alone. To come to reason, 'tis more Natural, for in the other State Man can't lawfully Answer his Physical End, and perform that which the Philosopher calls *Præstantissimum Opus Viventis*: I say he can neither do this lawfully, nor so much as agreeably to his Nature, since Beasts only have all Common, but Propriety is one of the most darling Prerogatives of Man.

Quest. 5. *Whether what Dr. Sherlock Cites out of Bishop Overall's Convocation Book, and other his Assertions, be sufficient to ground an Oath of Allegiance upon?*

Ans. 'T would be a pleasant thing to attempt Disputing over such an intricate Controversie in part of one half sheet: But to give some reply at present, though we meet with more on't in our next, Vide Quest. 1, 2, 3, 4. Numb. 5. 'till I can see a more satisfactory Answer to those excellent things printed in his Defence by one of the most learned Pens in the World, and 'till I can be pointed to any one single Government in any Place or Age, (besides that of the Jews) with all its Appendages, founded and settled on any other Foundations, or any other Principles of more general Use, or more easily intelligible, or more conducing to the Civil happiness of Mankind, which the great Law of Nature obliges us to preserve: I shall still be of the same mind I was ever since I read the Dr. and Answer the Question in the affirmative.

Quest. 6. *The strait line is 600 feet, and the Hill 6620, quere How many more Pales (each 6 Inches broad) will the Hill require than the strait line, all set at equal distances.*

Ans. You ought to have set down how much the distances are (if any) but we rather believe the design was that the Pales were intended to be set close together, if otherwise, declare in the next: in the mean time, taking it for granted, we answer, that 12000 Pales will fill the strait line, and the same number will be required to pale the Hill, the reason is, a perpendicular Pale is no broader upon the side or top of an Hill, than it is in a Valley or strait line.

Quest. 7. *If the Star in the Constellation of Cassiopeia, seen about 1619. and never before or since, was a Miracle?*

Ans. If such a Star was seen as is pretended in 1619, it is a Miracle, if there was an impossibility of seeing it before or since; but if upon a curious inquisition it could have been seen before or since, then 'tis no more a Miracle than the nature of this question, which is on purpose, or out of Error, stated a perfect Criticism and quibble.

Quest. 8. *Whether there is a Vacuum?*

Ans. In admitting a Vacuum, we run into very great Absurdities by offering false Conclusions from false Premises. I would ask our Vacuum Maintainers whether God or Nature ever did any thing in vain, either immediately, or by an accidental Consequence? they will answer in the Negative, or run into deeper Absurdities: Wherefore taking it for granted, I ask of what use is a Vacuum? or what produces it? their ignorance in the first we'll pass over, and if to the last they say, 'tis a privation of matter form'd by the separation of bodies; that also is an Error, for materiality can never be the Efficient cause of its Contrariety, viz. Nothing. We admit matter to be divisible and subdivisible, and so on ad Infinitum; if an Instrument could be made fine enough for separation, and the Eye strengthened to guide that Instrument to operate on such sub-divided Particles, but the Motion of none of them, nor any thing else can produce a Vacuum; for as the Air is driven forward by one body's motion, so that body is pursu'd by the Air behind: This is evident by the motion of a Feather, or any light matter, which will follow your hand if you strike the Air near it. Also, if you move a stick in the water, you will see the water pursue it as if Nature abhor'd a Vacuum. Now we argue a Majori, if thick water (or Air condens'd) admits not a Vacuum, the Air being much more subtle and refined cannot; and the Argument is yet the stronger, if we consider that Air may be contracted or dilated, as appears from several Inventions of Engines, Air Guns, &c.

Quest. 9. *What is the cause of Titillation?*

Ans. My Lord Bacon has observed, that a man is the most ticklish where the Skin is the thinnest, which as he adds, causes a quicker Emission of the Spirits; but this cannot be the Efficient reason, because another can tickle

me where I cannot tickle my self; and my Skin is no thicker when another touches it than when I touch it my self. The certain reason is, the abundance of Nerves, which are Ministers of sensation; as for Example, the Palms of the Hands, and the Soles of the Feet are very Nervous. Another reason is the unaccustomedness of touching those Places, as appears in this, that the hand is not so ticklish as the foot, because 'tis more used to it.

Quest. 10. *Why doth the Hair and Nails of dead People grow?*

Ans. Because that Humidity and Moisture that is the cause of their growth, is not exhausted till a considerable time after Death. But that which makes the Hair and Nails of dead People seem to grow faster than they really do, is the falling away and contraction of the Flesh, whereby the Hair and Nails appear nearer the Roots, and consequently seem longer.

Quest. 11. *What sort of Government is best?*

Ans. That Government which is most proper to a Nation in one Age, may be improper to the same Nation in another; witness the Jewish Policy, who were governed by Judges, Kings, and Tetrarchs, the two first we read to be the Institutions of Heaven, and there being an impossibility of two Bests at one time, the assertion above is demonstrated. But the particular Genius and Constitution of the English Nation seems to be calculated for a Monarchy, having never been so powerful and happy in any other Government; those that consult History cannot be ignorant of this Truth, which if particularized would not answer the brief design of this Paper; I only add one Remark, That Monarchy seems to be the most natural sort of Government, for what ever Nature produces that has more than one head, is esteemed monstrous, and more adapted to an hostile Tyranny than a paternal Rule.

Quest. 12. *Queritur num Argentum vivum a natura productum quod Nomen Liquoris Aeterni apud Plinium meruit, inveniri potuit decies septies aqua Thamesi ponderosius & apud quem venale reperiri Londini.*

Ans. Ingenue fateor Nondum periculum feci de eorum pondere, sed amicus est mihi in Metallis septentrionalibus versatus, qui asseruit se sepius venas argenti vivi invenisse natura productas, quem de hac re per literas tertio rem faciam, & postea responsum debite spondeo.

Quest. 13. *Whether a Confessor may discover Secrets committed to him?*

Ans. The Church of Rome may do what they please, who can be pardon'd when they please; for an ill thing not done, and an ill thing pardon'd are the same in Effect. But amongst Persons that are not depriv'd of Reason and common Civility, the question seems to bear this Answer, viz. That unless it be matter of Treason against the State, and Injury to our Neighbour, such an one is the greatest Villain in Nature, and at once breaks all his Bonds of Duty to Heaven, his Neighbour, and himself.

Quest. 14. *Whether Miracles are ceas'd?*

Ans. Much of the controversie lies in the Definition of a Miracle, which I believe not so easie to fix as is commonly imagined: That which appears to me most full is—A work beyond the ordinary power of Nature produced by a Divine Agent, the Doubt recurs, How shall we know the Agent Divine? I answer, by comparing and examining what's thereby done, and the end it proposes with Reason and Revelation.

To answer the Question expressly, I grant 'tis generally held in the Affirmative, and the Argument seems very strong, God does nothing in vain, nor will make any Contradiction in Nature, unless for some weighty and even necessary Reason; none of which can now be pretended. But the truth of the last Assertion I am a little doubtful of. A warning given to any Person of impeding unavoidable danger by a Dream, or any thing of that Nature, comes up to the present Definition. I know not how to answer several undoubted matters of Fact of that Nature, nor therefore to affirm the total ceasing of Miracles on all Occasions. But thus far the forementioned Argument may hold, that we are to expect none such for the Confirmation of any ancient Doctrines, nor to receive any new ones because attested by strange things, but rather suspect them.

ADVERTISEMENT.

WE had prepared a large Answer to the 20th. Question in Numb. 2. but we think it more proper to reserve the Publication of it till the conclusion of our first Volume, than to add it here.

This Paper will be published every Tuesday and Saturday.